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UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

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DUPLICATE

Atty. Dkt. No: 5181-38400
P4359

Inventor(s):

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Monica Wong-Chan; Christopher J.
Jackson; Thomas P. Webber; Mark D. Hill

Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR
ENHANCING COMMUNICATION
BETWEEN DEVICES IN A
COMPUTER SYSTEM

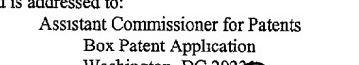
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Application Elements

1. Filing Fee
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Total Claims	20	-20=	0	x \$18.00=	\$0.00
Independent Claims	3	-3 =	0	x \$78.00=	\$0.00
Multiple Dependent Claims				Fee:	
				Basic Fee:	\$690.00
				Assignment Fee:	\$40.00
				Sub-Total:	\$730.00
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A check in the amount of \$730.00 is enclosed.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any other fees which may be required or credit any overpayment to Conley, Rose, & Tayon, P.C., Deposit Account No. 03-2769/5181-38400.

One duplicate copy of this form is enclosed.

2. Specification
____ Total Pages, or
8 pages of specification; 5 pages of claims (1-20); 1 page of Abstract

3. Drawings
Informal Figures 1-5 on 5 sheets

4. Oath or Declaration
 Newly executed
 Copy from a prior application (see 37 C.F.R. § 1.63(d))

5. This application is filed by fewer than all the inventors named in the prior application
 Delete the following inventor(s) named in the prior non-provisional application:

 The inventor(s) to be deleted are set forth on a separate sheet attached hereto.

6. The entire disclosure of the prior application is considered to be part of the accompanying application and is hereby incorporated by reference herein.
7. Microfiche Computer Program (Appendix)
8. Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission (if applicable, all necessary)
 Computer Readable copy
 Paper Copy (identical to computer copy)
 Statement verifying identity of above copies
9. Assignment Papers
10. Power of Attorney
 Is attached.
 The power of attorney appears in the original papers of the prior application.
 Since the power does not appear in the original papers, a copy of the power in the prior application is enclosed.
11. Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)
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12. Amendments
 A preliminary amendment is enclosed.
 Enter the unentered amendment previously filed on _____ under 37 C.F.R. § 116 in the prior application.
 Cancel in this application original claim(s) _____ of the prior application before calculating the filing fee. At least one original independent claim is retained for filing purposes.
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13. Return Receipt Postcard(s)
14. Small Entity Status
 A small entity statement is enclosed.
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15. Priority of foreign application number _____, filed on _____ in _____ is claimed under 35 U.S.C. §§ 119(a)-(d)
16. Petition under 37 C.F.R. § 136 for Extension of Time
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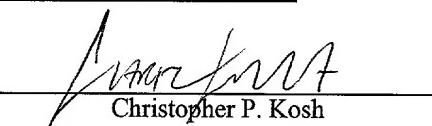
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42,760

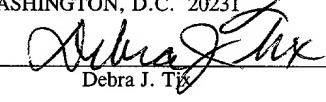
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Debra J. Tix

System and Method for Enhancing Communication
Between Devices in a Computer System

By:

David A. Wood
Robert C. Zak Jr.
Monica Wong-Chan
Christopher J. Jackson
Thomas P. Webber
Mark D. Hill

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

5 This invention relates generally to the field of computer systems and, more particularly, to communication protocols within computer systems.

2. Description of the Related Art

10 High speed, low latency communications networks that include unreliable transport media often rely on a communications protocol to implement a reliable message transport. Examples of such communications protocols include TCP, NGIO 1.0, and PCI 2.x. In some of these protocols, a request can be sent from a sending device to a target device and an acknowledgment (ACK) can be sent in response from the target device back to the sending device. The sending device may include a timeout mechanism such that it can resend the request if an ACK is not received from the target device within a timeout duration set by properties of the communications network.

15 Some protocols may use a negative acknowledgement (NAK) to indicate that the target device or the communications network has detected an error. Errors can include data corruption, an illegal packet type, etc. The NAK can give a positive indication that an error has occurred and may also indicate the type of error that occurred. A sending device may, depending on the 20 communications protocol, resend the request in response to a NAK.

25 In some communications networks, certain types of errors may temporarily prevent a target device from processing an incoming request. These types of errors can include a temporary loss of system resources (e.g., a dynamic reconfiguration of a node), a temporary lack of processing resources on the target device, or a lack of a valid virtual to physical address translation in cases where the contents of the request are to be written in the virtual address space

of the target device's node. While these errors may be temporary, the time required to resolve them can vary widely. For example, a dynamic reconfiguration of system resources in a server may take on the order of hundreds of milliseconds to resolve, a page miss in the virtual memory system may take on the order of tens of milliseconds to resolve, and a temporary resource 5 unavailability in the network interface may take on the order of hundreds of microseconds to resolve. Thus, the time that the temporary unavailable condition persists may vary by four orders of magnitude or more.

When a target device is temporarily unable to process a request, it can send a NAK to the 10 sending device. The sending device can later resend the request, but it may again receive a NAK from the target device if the temporarily unavailable condition has not been cleared. This process could potentially repeat a large number of times and result in a large increase of traffic 15 on the communications network. Alternatively, the sending device may delay the resending of the request too long (i.e. well beyond the time needed for the target device to resolve the temporarily unavailable condition). As a result, unnecessary latencies may result in the sending device as the processing of its request is delayed. A system and method is needed to more 20 efficiently handle conditions where a target device may be temporarily unavailable.

SUMMARY

The problems outlined above are in large part solved by the use of the apparatus and 25 method described herein. Generally speaking, an apparatus and method for resending a request in a computer system using a delay value is provided. In response to receiving a request, a target device in a computer system may detect that it is temporarily unable to process the request. The target device can send a response to the sending device to indicate that it is temporarily unavailable. The response can include a delay value that can provide a hint to the sending device as to when to resend the request. The target device may generate the delay value according to the type of condition that is causing it to be temporarily unavailable. The delay value may be generated according to a static heuristic or a dynamic algorithm based on previous temporarily

unavailable conditions. The delay value may also be used by an error recovery mechanism where a sending device exceeds a retry limit for a particular request.

The apparatus and method described herein may advantageously expedite communication between devices in a computer system. By using the delay value received with a response from a target device, a sending device may more effectively time the resending of a request to more closely correspond with the resolution of a temporarily unavailable condition at the target device. As a result, network traffic and latencies associated with the processing of a request may advantageously be reduced. In addition, the apparatus and method may advantageously allow a target device to determine an appropriate time to retry the resending of a request, thereby allowing a target-independent retry policy at a sending device.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Other objects and advantages of the invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and upon reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of devices configured to communicate according to a communications protocol.

Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of a computer system.

Fig. 3 is a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of a computer system.

Fig. 4 is a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of a computer system.

Fig. 5 is a flow chart illustrating a method for enhancing communication in between devices.

While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments thereof are shown by way of example in the drawings and will herein be described in detail. It should be understood, however, that the drawings and detailed description thereto are not intended to limit the invention to the particular form disclosed, but on the contrary, the
5 intention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined by the appended claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF AN EMBODIMENT

10 Turning now to Fig. 1, a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of devices configured to communicate according to a communications protocol is shown. Other embodiments are possible and contemplated. Fig. 1 depicts sending device 110 coupled to target device 120 using communications medium 100. Communications medium 100 may comprise one or more of the communications networks shown in Fig. 2, Fig. 3, and Fig. 4. Sending device 110 and target device 120 can be configured to exchange packets of information or other suitable forms of information according to a communications protocol.
15

20 In the embodiment of Fig. 1, sending device 110 and target device 120 can be configured to exchange requests 112 and responses 122 with one another. For example, sending device 110 can be configured to convey a request 112 to target device 120. Target device 120 can be configured to convey response 122 in response to receiving or processing request 112 from device 110. Response 122 conveyed from target device 120 may comprise an acknowledgment (ACK) or a negative acknowledgment (NAK) according to a communications protocol employed by the devices.
25

At certain times, target device 120 may be temporarily unable to process a request from sending device 110. These periods may be referred to as “temporarily unavailable conditions” and may occur when target device 120 is handling another operation that temporarily prevents the processing of a request from sending device 110 that encounters the temporarily unavailable

- condition. Such operations may include a temporarily loss of system resources (e.g., a dynamic reconfiguration of a node), a temporary lack of processing resources on the target device, or a lack of a valid virtual to physical address translation in cases where the contents of the request are to be written in the virtual address space of the target device's node. In response to detecting
- 5 a temporarily unavailable condition, target device 120 can be configured to convey a negative acknowledgment (NAK) or other type of response to sending device 110. The NAK can indicate to sending device 110 that target device 120 is temporarily unable to process the request received from sending device 110. In certain embodiments, target device 120 can be configured to convey different types of NAKs depending on the type of temporarily unavailable condition detected.
- 10 The NAK can include a delay value that can be used by sending device 110 as a hint for determining how long to delay the resending of its request. Using the delay value, sending device 110 may advantageously resend its request at a time when target device 120 may be able to process the request, i.e., after sufficient time to allow the temporarily unavailable condition to be cleared at target device 120. In certain configurations or for certain types of temporarily unavailable conditions, sending device 110 may be configured to ignore the delay value and independently determine when to resend its request.

In one embodiment, target device 120 can be configured to generate a delay value according to the type of operation that is causing a temporarily unavailable condition. In this manner, different delay values can be generated for different types of operations as the different types of operations may vary widely as to the amount of time necessary for target device 120 to clear the temporarily unavailable condition. Target device 120 can generate delay values according to a set value for each type of operation, a programmed value for each type of operation, or a dynamically calculated value for each type of operation. Target device 120 may be configured to store historical data from previous temporarily unavailable conditions and may calculate delay values from this data. Target device 120 may also keep track of the number of outstanding responses it has sent for a particular temporarily unavailable condition. In doing so, target device 120 can convey delay values that indicate longer and longer delay periods as the number of outstanding responses increases. The delay value may be encoded to minimize the

size and/or number of packets needed for the NAK. In one particular embodiment, the delay value can be encoded according to an exponential encoding in order to cover numerous orders of magnitude range.

5 In response to receiving a NAK that includes a delay value from target device 120, sending device 110 can use the delay value to determine when to resend its request. If the delay value is sent in an encoded format, sending device 110 can decode the delay value in order to determine when to resend the request. By using the delay value, sending device 110 may resend the request at a time where target device 120 will more likely be able to process the request
10 without unnecessarily delaying the resending of the request. In this manner, overall traffic between sending device 110 and target device 120 may be reduced as sending device 110 may reduce the number of times it resends the request (also resulting in a decrease in the number of NAKs sent by target device 120).

15 In certain embodiments, a policy layer can determine a retry limit for a particular request sent by sending device 110. In response to sending device 110 resending its request in excess of the retry limit, the policy layer can be configured to detect an error and can initiate an error recovery mechanism based on the type of NAK most recently received from target device 120. In this manner, the type of NAK can allow for different error recovery mechanisms based on
20 different types of temporarily unavailable conditions at target device 120. In other embodiments, the policy layer can be configured to detect an error and can initiate an error recovery mechanism based on the delay value corresponding to the most recently received NAK from target device 120.

25 Turning now to Fig. 2, a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of a computer system is shown. Other embodiments are possible and contemplated. Fig. 2 depicts devices 220a, 220b, 220c, 220d, 220e, and 220f coupled to switching network 210. Other embodiments may include any number of devices coupled to switching network 210.

Devices 220a, 220b, 220c, 220d, 220e, and 220f can be configured to communicate with one another through switching network 210 using a communications protocol. Switching network 210 can be configured to receive a request from one of devices 220a, 220b, 220c, 220d, 220e, or 220f and route it to the appropriate device 220a, 220b, 220c, 220d, 220e, or 220f.

5 Similarly, switching network 210 can be configured to receive a response to the request from one of devices 220a, 220b, 220c, 220d, 220e, or 220f and route it to the appropriate device 220a, 220b, 220c, 220d, 220e, or 220f. Devices 220a, 220b, 220c, 220d, 220e, and 220f can be configured to use delay values as described above in Fig. 1.

10 Turning now to Fig. 3, a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of a computer system is shown. Other embodiments are possible and contemplated. Fig. 3 depicts device 310a coupled to device 310b, device 310b coupled to device 310c, device 310c coupled to device 310d, device 310d coupled to device 310e, device 310e coupled to device 310f, and device 310f coupled to device 310a in an arbitrated loop. Other embodiments may include any number of devices coupled in an arbitrated loop configuration.

15

Devices 310a, 310b, 310c, 310d, 310e, and 310f can be configured to communicate with one another through the arbitrated loop using a communications protocol. The devices can send and receive requests and responses from the arbitrated loop and can be configured to use delay values as described above in Fig. 1.

20 Turning now to Fig. 4, a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of a computer system is shown. Other embodiments are possible and contemplated. Fig. 4 depicts devices 410a, 410b, 410c, 410d, 410e, and 410f coupled to shared bus 420. Other embodiments may include any number of devices coupled to shared bus 420.

25 Devices 410a, 410b, 410c, 410d, 410e, and 410f can be configured to communicate with one another across shared bus 420 using a communications protocol. The devices can send and

receive requests and responses from shared bus 420 and can be configured to use delay values as described above in Fig. 1.

Although Fig. 2, Fig. 3, and Fig. 4 illustrate embodiments of configurations for
5 communication between the devices, other configurations and communications media are
possible and contemplated.

Turning now to Fig. 5, a flow chart illustrating a method for enhancing communication in
between devices is shown. Variations of the method are possible and contemplated. In Fig. 5, a
10 first device can convey a request to a second device as illustrated in block 502. A second device
can receive the request as illustrated in block 504. Block 506 illustrates determining whether the
second device is temporarily unavailable. If the second device is not temporarily unavailable,
then the second device may convey an acknowledgement (ACK) to the first device as illustrated
in block 508. If the second device is temporarily unavailable, then the second device can
15 determine a delay value as illustrated in block 510. The second device can convey a NAK that
includes the delay value to the first device as illustrated in block 512. Block 514 illustrates
determining whether a retry limit has been exceeded. If the retry limit has not been exceeded,
then the first device can re-convey the request at a later time according to the delay value as
illustrated in block 516. The method can then resume at block 504 as indicated. If the retry limit
20 has been exceeded, then an error recovery mechanism can be initiated according to a type of the
NAK as illustrated in block 518.

Although the embodiments above have been described in considerable detail, other
versions are possible. Numerous variations and modifications will become apparent to those
25 skilled in the art once the above disclosure is fully appreciated. It is intended that the following
claims be interpreted to embrace all such variations and modifications.

WE CLAIM:

1. A computer system comprising:

5 a first device; and

a second device coupled to said first device;

wherein said first device is configured to convey a first request to said second device,

10 wherein said second device is configured to receive said first request, wherein said second device is configured to detect a temporarily unavailable condition, wherein said second device is configured to convey a response to said first device corresponding to said first request, and wherein said response includes a delay value corresponding to said temporarily unavailable condition.

15 2. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said first device is configured to receive said response, and wherein said first device is configured to convey a second request to said second device at a time corresponding to said delay value.

20 3. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said second device is configured to generate said delay value according to a type of said temporarily unavailable condition.

25 4. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said delay value corresponds to a first value in response to said temporarily unavailable condition corresponding to a first type of condition and wherein said delay value corresponds to a second value in response to said temporarily unavailable condition corresponding to a second type of condition.

5. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said second device is configured to calculate
said delay value using one or more variables that correspond to one or more previous temporarily
unavailable conditions.
- 5 6. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said delay value corresponds to an encoded
value.
7. The computer system of claim 1, further comprising:
10 a policy layer coupled to said first device and said second device, wherein said policy
layer is configured to cause an error recovery mechanism to be initiated in
response to detecting that a retry limit corresponding to said first request is
exceeded, and wherein said error recovery mechanism is configured to perform an
action according to said response.
- 15 8. A computer system comprising:
20 a communications medium;
a first device coupled to said communications medium; and
a second device coupled to said communications medium;
wherein said first device is configured to receive a response from said second device
25 indicating that said second device is temporarily unavailable, wherein said
response corresponds to a first request conveyed by said first device, wherein said
response includes a delay value, and wherein said first device is configured to
convey second request corresponding to said first request at a time corresponding
to said delay value.

9. The computer system of claim 8, wherein said communications medium comprises a switching network.

5 10. The computer system of claim 8, wherein said communications medium comprises a shared bus.

11. The computer system of claim 8, wherein said communications medium comprises an arbitrated loop.

10

12. The computer system of claim 8, wherein said second device is configured to calculate said delay value using one or more variables that correspond to one or more previous temporarily unavailable conditions.

15 13. The computer system of claim 8, wherein said delay value corresponds to an encoded value.

14. The computer system of claim 8, further comprising:

20 a policy layer coupled to said communications medium, wherein said policy layer is configured to cause an error recovery mechanism to be initiated in response to detecting that a retry limit corresponding to said second request is exceeded, and wherein said error recovery mechanism is configured to perform an action according to said response.

25

15. A method comprising:

conveying a first request from a first device to a second device;

detecting a temporarily unavailable condition at said second device;
generating a delay value corresponding to said temporarily unavailable condition; and
5 conveying a response corresponding to said first request to from said second device to
said first device, wherein said response includes said delay value.

16. The method of claim 15, further comprising:

10 conveying a second request from said first device to said second device at a time
corresponding to said delay value.

17. The method of claim 15, further comprising:

15 initiating an error recovery mechanism corresponding to said response in response to
determining that a retry limit corresponding to said first request has been
exceeded.

18. The method of claim 15, further comprising:

20 encoding said delay value prior to said conveying said response.

19. The method of claim 15, wherein said generating further comprises:

25 determining a type of said temporarily unavailable condition; and

generating said delay value according to said type of said temporarily unavailable
condition.

20. The method of claim 15, further comprising:

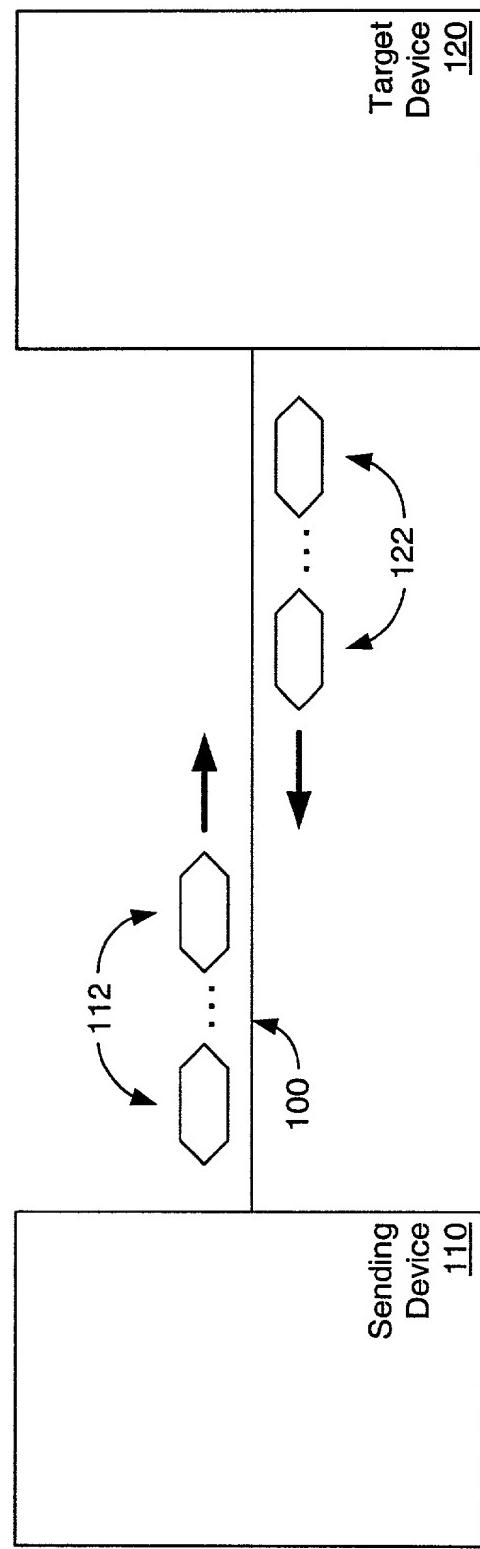
generating said delay value using one or more variables that correspond to one or more previous temporarily unavailable conditions.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An apparatus and method for resending a request in a computer system using a delay value is provided. In response to receiving a request, a target device in a computer system may detect that it is temporarily unable to process the request. The target device can send a response to the sending device to indicate that it is temporarily unavailable. The response can include a delay value that can provide a hint to the sending device as to when to resend the request. The target device may generate the delay value according to the type of condition that is causing it to be temporarily unavailable. The delay value may be generated according to a static heuristic or a dynamic algorithm based on previous temporarily unavailable conditions. The delay value may also be used by an error recovery mechanism where a sending device exceeds a retry limit for a particular request.

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Fig. 1



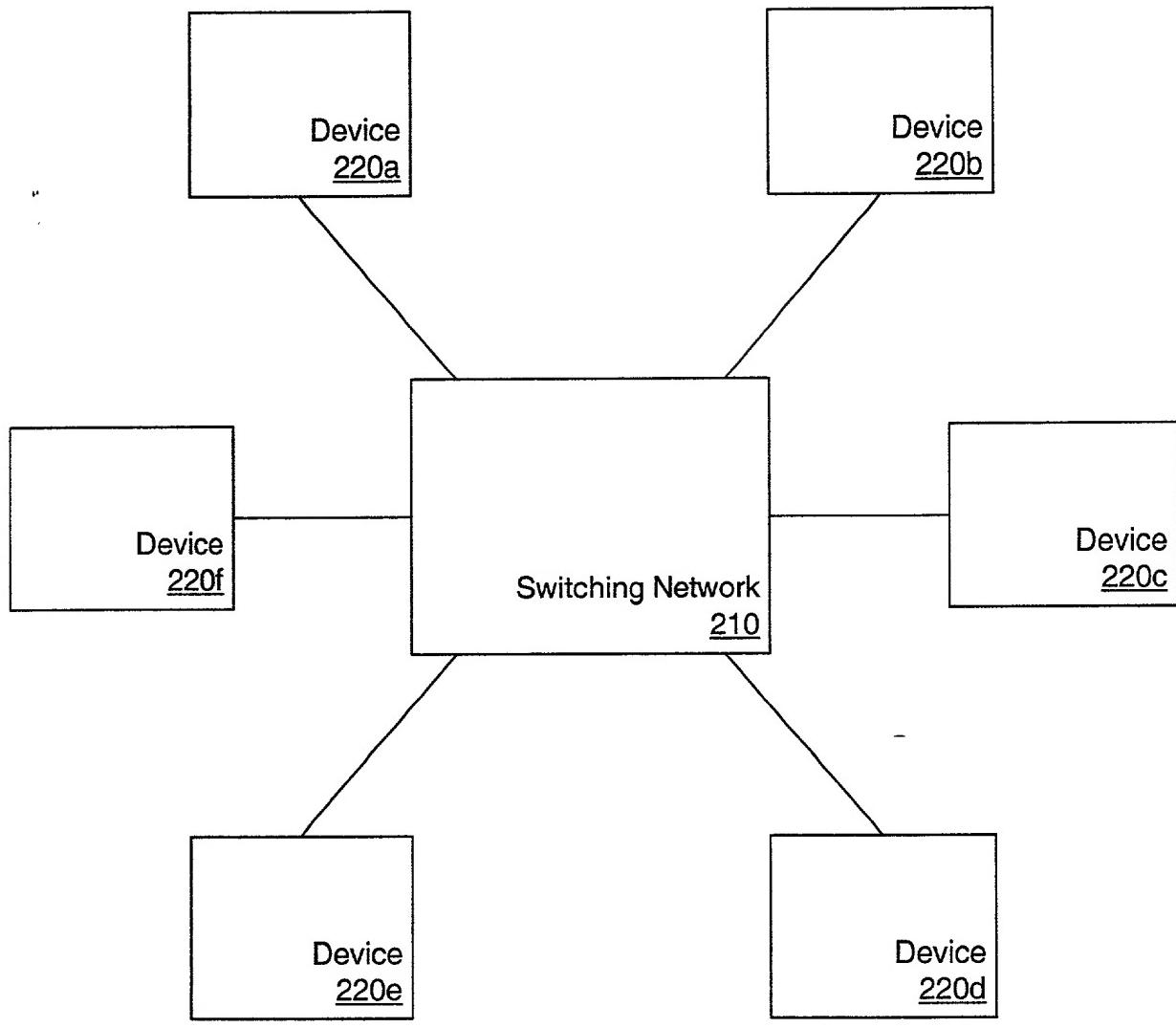


Fig. 2

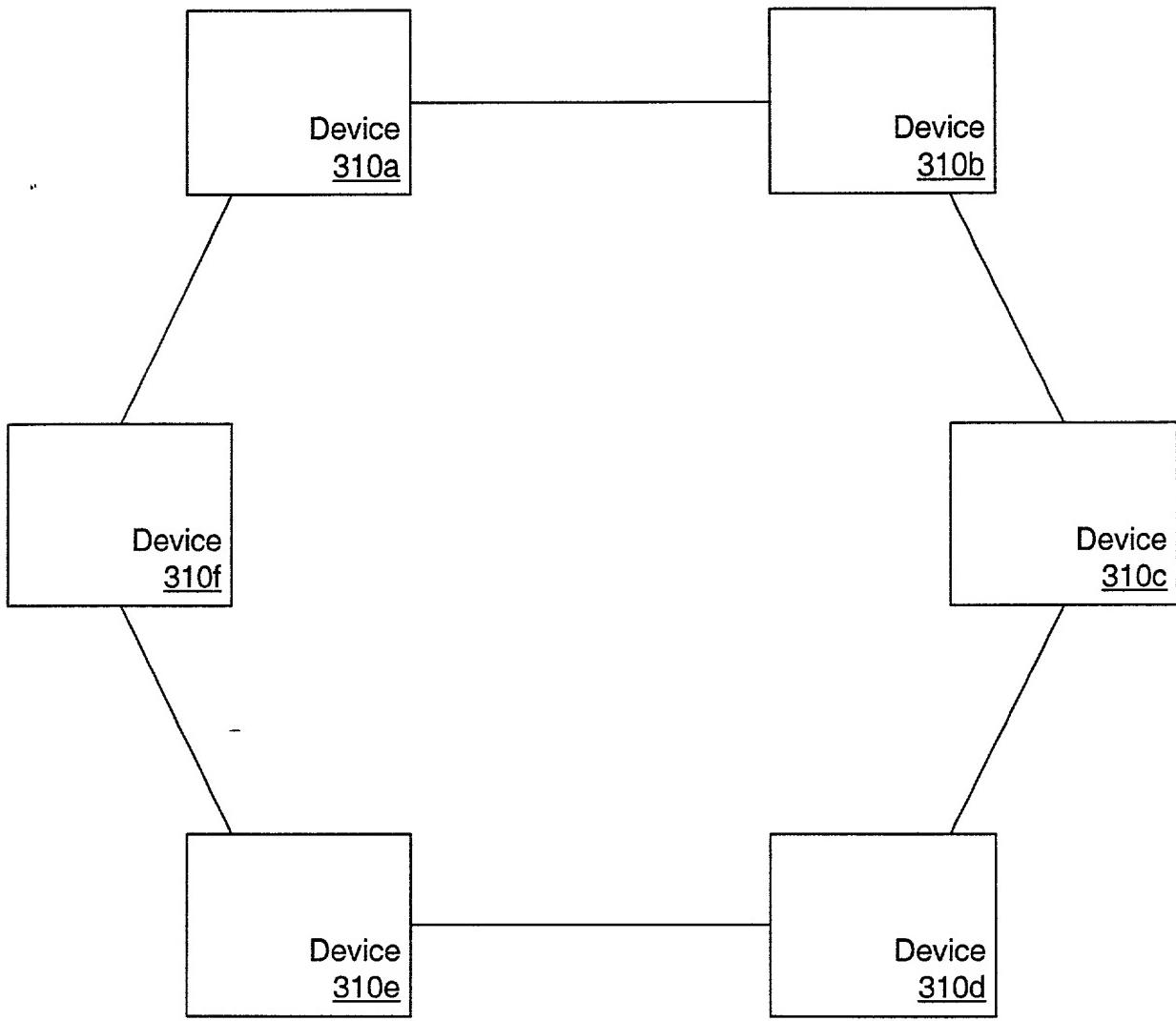


Fig. 3

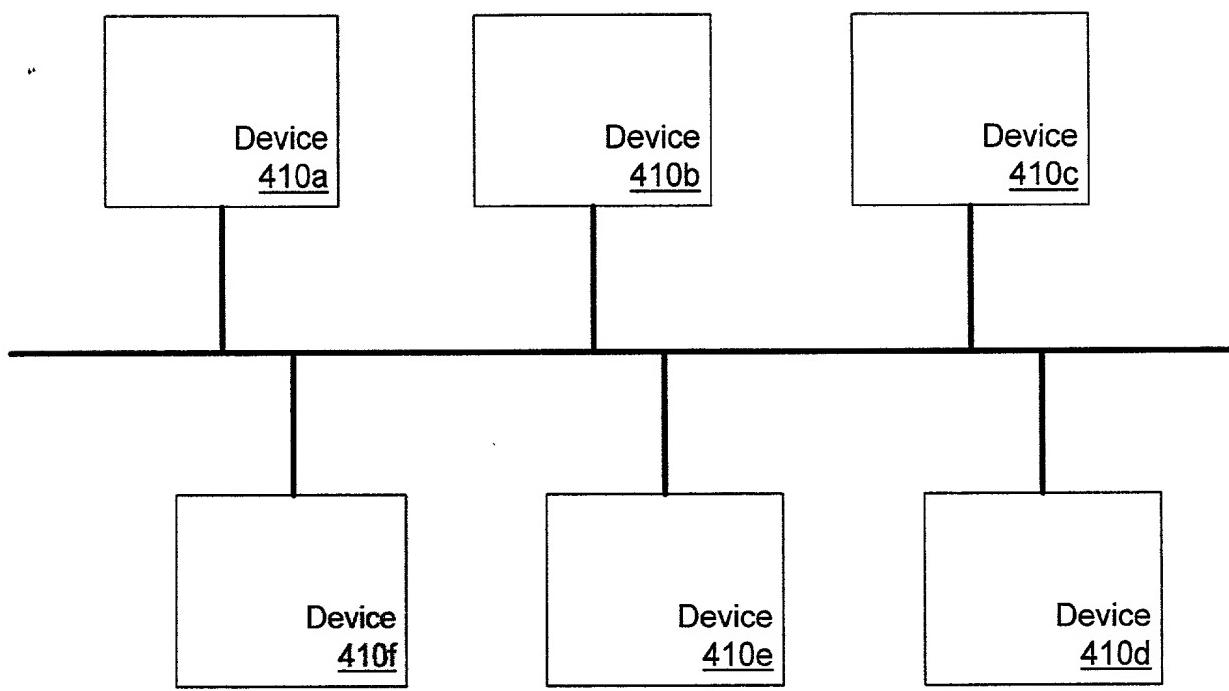


Fig. 4

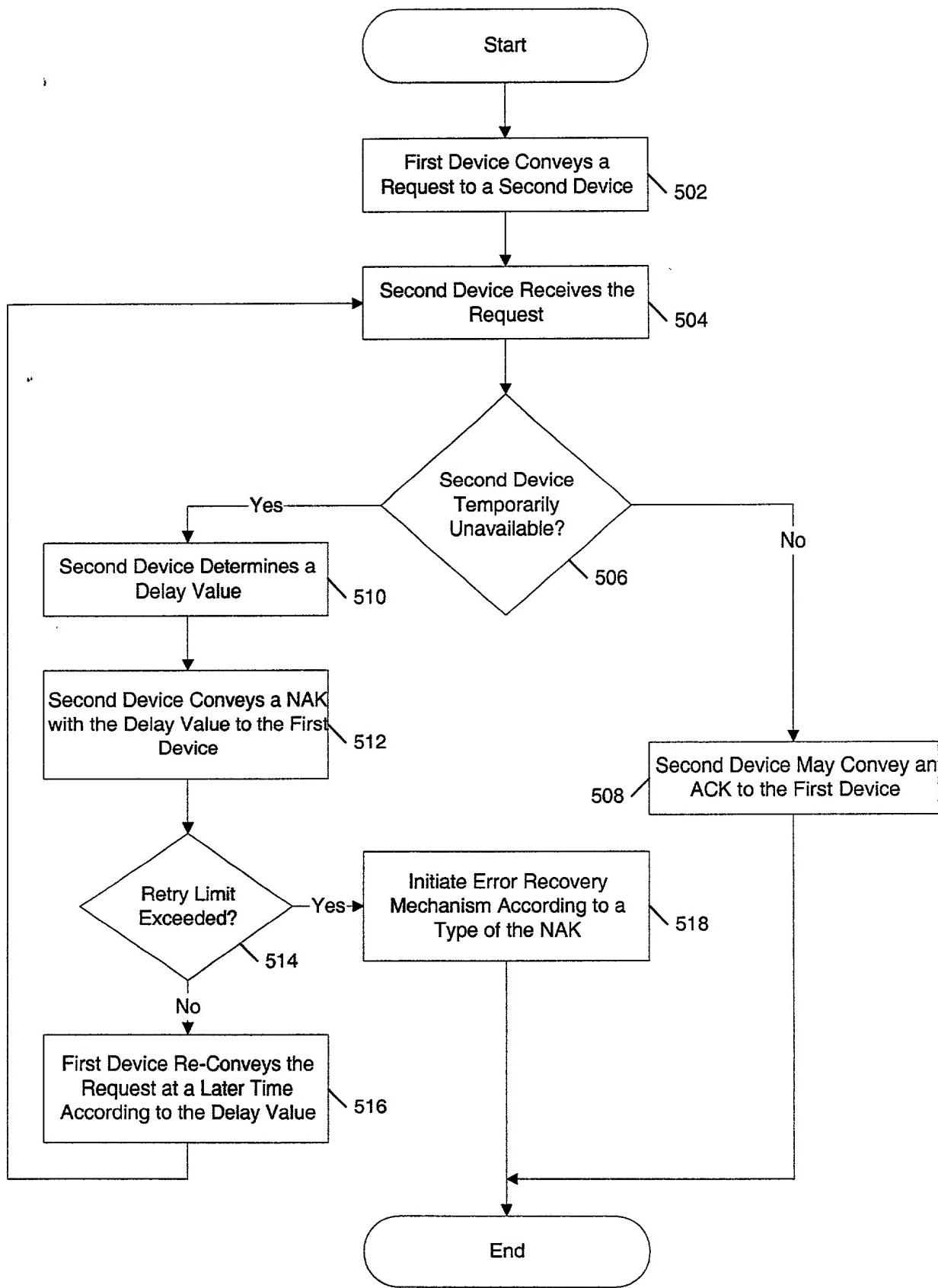


Fig. 5

DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address, and citizenship are as stated below next to my name.

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ENHANCING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DEVICES IN A COMPUTER SYSTEM," the specification of which:

- is attached hereto.
 was filed on _____ as Application Serial No. _____
and was amended on _____ (if applicable).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose to the Patent and Trademark Office all information known to me to be material to patentability of the subject matter claimed in this application, as "materiality" is defined in 37 C.F.R. § 1.56.

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or § 365(b) of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate listed below, or under § 365(a) of any PCT international application listed below designating least one country other than the United States of America, and have identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate, or of any PCT international application, having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed.

Prior Foreign Application No.	Country	Filing Date (mm/dd/yy)	Priority Claimed	Cert. copy Attached
N/A	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below.

Provisional Application No.	Filing Date (mm/dd/yy)
N/A	_____
_____	_____

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. § 120 of any United States application(s) listed below, or under § 365(c) of any PCT international application listed below designating the United States of America, and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States or PCT international application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of 35 U.S.C. § 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose all information known to me to be material to the patentability of the subject matter claimed in this application, as "materiality" is defined in 37 C.F.R. § 1.56, which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application.

Parent Application No.	Filing Date (mm/dd/yy)	Parent Patent No. (if applicable) or Status
N/A	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

I hereby revoke any previous Powers of Attorney and appoint:

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each of said attorneys being employed by Sun Microsystems; and

Mark L. Berrier, Reg. No. 35,066; Dan R. Christen, Reg. No. 39,943; Gentry E. Crook, Reg. No. 44,633; Kevin L. Daffer, Reg. No. 34,146; Mark R. DeLuca, Reg. No. 44,649; Jeffrey C. Hood, Reg. No. 35,198; Robert C. Jahnke, Reg. No. 44,800; B. Noël Kivlin, Reg. No. 33,929; Christopher P. Kosh, Reg. No. 42,760; Robert C. Kowert, Reg. No. 39,255; Lawrence J. Merkel, Reg. No. 41,191; Eric B. Meyertons, Reg. No. 34,876; Louise K. Miller, Reg. No. 36,609; David W. Quimby, Reg. No. 39,338; Eric A. Stephenson, Reg. No. 38,321; Larry D. Thompson, Reg. No. 43,952; David A. Rose, Reg. No. 26,223

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Please direct all communications to:

Christopher P. Kosh
Conley, Rose & Tayon, P.C.
P.O. Box 398
Austin, Texas 78767-0398
Phone: (512) 476-1400

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made herein on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under 18 U.S.C. § 1001 and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

Inventor's Full Name:

A.
David Wood

Inventor's Signature:

Date: 1/14/00

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Citizenship: U.S.A.

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(Include number, street name, city, state and zip code)

Inventor's Full Name:

Robert C. Zak, Jr.

Inventor's Signature:

Date: 1-3-2000

City and State (or Foreign Country) of Residence:

Bolton, MA

Citizenship: U.S.A.

Post Office and Residence Address:

133 Wilder Rd., Bolton, MA 01740

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